

Sermon on the Mount - Part 9

by David Servant

Jesus teaches that divorce and remarriage are complex issues that must be approached with a higher level of righteousness than the scribes and Pharisees.

Duration: 28:30

Scripture: Matthew 5:31

Topics: "Divorce Remarriage", "Gods Mercy"

Description

This sermon delves into the topic of divorce and remarriage as discussed in Matthew chapter 5, emphasizing Jesus' teachings on adultery, the Pharisees' misinterpretations, and the biblical perspectives on divorce and remarriage. It challenges common interpretations and encourages a holistic view of the Bible's teachings on this controversial subject, highlighting God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness in the context of divorce and remarriage.

Transcript

Well, it's a beautiful morning here in Galilee in Israel. I'm sitting once again on Mount Arbel. The sun has just come over the horizon, over the Sea of Galilee, off in this direction.

It's a little bit windier this morning than what we've been accustomed to, but that's actually nice because that keeps all these little fleas that have been eating me alive far away. We're continuing through the Sermon on the Mount, and if you have your Bible, could you open it to Matthew chapter five? We're going to begin reading in just a moment in verse number 31, but let's set the background before we dive in. Jesus has told all of his disciples who gathered there that day, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

From that point on, he begins to elaborate as to precisely what he means by that. Where were the Pharisees and scribes falling short, and how could his disciples do better? Jesus raises the bar considerably because the scribes and Pharisees and rulers of the synagogues had lowered the bar considerably. Throughout this section then, he often says, you have heard it was said, and then he quotes something that they had heard was said, either a verbatim quote from the Old Testament or something that was a commentary really, and nothing more than a commentary, and usually a perverted commentary by the scribes and Pharisees.

Then he would say, but I say to you, and don't make the mistake of thinking that Jesus is altering the word of God of the Old Covenant or the Old Testament, no, he just said a few sentences ago, I did not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill, to fill to the full, and so as we interpret his words when he says, but I say to you, he's not saying anything new that you can't find if you just dig a little bit in the Old Testament, he's just reiterating and restating what has already been stated quite clearly there, but which has been so perverted by the scribes and Pharisees. Well, this next subject, he raises the bar on divorce and remarriage, and I want you to point out that he talks about both of them together, and we need to consider those two things together. One of the first things that he said, well, let's set the stage even further.

He began, and we read this in our last program, in verse number 27, saying, you have heard it said, you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you, whoever looks at a woman to lust for her, and so on. So we see that he is raising the bar as far as adultery is concerned. Here's one of the 10 commandments, and the Pharisees and scribes would teach and practice, don't physically commit adultery, but now Jesus is going to define adultery as God would define it.

He's saying, it's not just the physical act of adultery, but it is also the mental act of adultery, and so lust is forbidden. Now, was that something new? Is this a new concept for the New Testament? No, no, a thousand times no. In the 10 commandments, the 10th commandment, God said, thou shalt not covet your neighbor's wife.

Well, the reason that men sometimes covet their neighbor's wife usually is because of lust. So you see, lust was prohibited, and David prayed, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight. So under the old covenant, it was important to God what was going on in our hearts and in our minds.

So Jesus is just raising the bar to where it should have been all along. And then another area where the Pharisees and scribes were actually committing adultery in the eyes of God was in the area of divorce and remarriage. And I closed the former program by asking you to consider different cases of divorce and remarriage.

The scribes and Pharisees were clearly guilty of the first kind of which I spoke of, finding someone who was more attractive, not wanting to commit adultery with the woman with whom they were lusting in their minds, and so they would divorce their wives, having found a loophole in the law to do that, and then quickly remarry. And Jesus is essentially saying, that's no different than adultery. And anyone can see that, that is no different than adultery.

Just because you found a loophole to justify your adultery in the law of Moses, that doesn't mean that you have pulled the wool over God's eyes. All right, all that being said now, listen to what Christ says, and we'll discuss it as much as we possibly can in this broadcast. He says in verse 31, and notice again, the subject is still, what is adultery in God's eyes? It was said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of dismissal.

Now in my Bible, that's all capitalized. I wish they hadn't have done that, because although it's derived from the Old Testament, it's not a verbatim quote, and it certainly is a misleading quotation, because nowhere in the Old Testament does it say, whoever divorces his wife, just make sure you give her a certificate of dismissal. Just give her a certificate, and that's all that God requires you.

But that's exactly what the Pharisees taught. They placed great emphasis on the giving of the certificate. And they actually believed, most of them believed, you could divorce your wife for any cause at all.

Why? Well, they had found a verse in Deuteronomy, chapter 24, that talked about divorcing your wife because you found an indecency in her. And the big debate, even before the time of Jesus, amongst the Pharisees was, well, what constitutes an indecency? And there were liberals and there were conservatives. There were two sides in the argument.

There was one school that followed Rabbi Hillel, another school that followed Rabbi Shammai, and one was liberal, one was conservative. The conservative one said, no, you can't divorce your wife for any reason at all. It's got to be something very, very serious, you know, sexual infidelity or something.

Whereas the liberal school said, oh, an indecency, it's basically anything that makes your wife indecent in your eyes. And this is historically true, not only from scripture, but from manuscripts that still have survived from that day. We actually have the list of the things that these guys said could make your wife indecent in your eyes.

If she spoke to another man in public, that made her indecent, you could lawfully divorce her. Just make sure you give her that certificate. If she spun around in public so that she exposed her knees, you could divorce her.

And here's the most amazing one of all. They said that if a man finds a woman, if he sees a woman who's more attractive to him than his wife, that makes his wife indecent in his eyes. And so he can lawfully divorce her.

Well, you can see, with divorce being so easy in their minds, they would have been divorcing their wives all the time. And so the guy up in front of you in the synagogue on the Sabbath, you know, could have been married three or four times. And yet he's up there preaching, don't commit adultery.

God says, don't commit adultery. But he's had multiple wives as a consequence of his lust. And so can you see Jesus saying, this is absolutely no different than adultery.

And if you divorce your wife and marry another, you're committing adultery. All right. I'm going to have you turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 24, because we're going to discuss this in a little bit more detail.

And we're going to find out exactly what the Old Testament did teach about divorce and remarriage. Because remember, Jesus said, I didn't come to abolish the law. And so everything in the law is not like it's Moses' idea and Jesus has now come to correct it.

No. The Ten Commandments were written by the finger of God. They were not Moses' idea.

It was God's idea. And so all these things we read in Genesis and Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, the law of Moses, it was the law of God. Let's see what God said under the Old Covenant.

Let's see what Jesus said under the Old Covenant about divorce and remarriage. Because when the law of Moses was given, that was about 1,300 years before Jesus arrived on the earth. And of course, Adam and Eve were created about 3,000 years before Jesus came.

Let's see what God said about divorce and remarriage for those 3,000 years. And then after giving the law for those 1,300 years. And is Jesus going to suddenly come and completely change the view that God has of divorce and remarriage? Well, that would seem unlikely.

You know, that's a pretty basic thing. Why would Jesus come now and suddenly surprise the whole world by making a new rule that would condemn a lot of people who had previously not been condemned? All right. Deuteronomy chapter 24.

Listen to this. When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her. Now, it doesn't say what the indecency was at all.

It doesn't give you a clue. But then it goes on to say that if he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house. Well, there it is.

You know, it says something about writing a certificate. That's what the Pharisees inscribed, honed in on, and made it, you know, perverted it to make it a commandment to make sure that, you know, if you, as many of us have, found indecencies in our wives, make sure you give her that certificate. That's what they focused on.

But that's not at all the focus of this commandment. So here's a woman. It doesn't say whether the indecency that the husband found was, you know, justified or not.

It just says she's divorced now, and she has this certificate of divorce in her hands. And then it says, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife. So now she's remarried.

And I might point out to you, it never said, and she sinned in the process. And verse number three, and if the latter husband, so this is her second husband now, turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house. So now she's twice divorced.

She's got two certificates. All right? And that's just setting the stage. God has not said there's been anything done that's been right or wrong at all so far.

Or if the latter husband, that is the second husband, dies who took her to be his wife. Now listen to it. Here's the commandment.

Here's the commandment. This is the only thing that God said in this situation that would be wrong. Then her former husband, that is her first husband, who sent her away, is not allowed to take her again to be his wife since she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land, and so on.

And so you can see this commandment only involves a very specific situation. A twice-divorced woman or a once-divorced, once-widowed woman, she's forbidden to remarry her first husband. And that's it.

There's nothing else said here regarding any other situations. There's nothing said ever about remarriage ever being a sin. In fact, the implication is ... Now listen closely.

She's been twice married, twice divorced. She's forbidden to go back to her first husband, implying that it's lawful for her to remarry any other person who would take a chance on her. You see? Okay, so maybe, just maybe, we've misinterpreted what Jesus said because this is also what Jesus said.

It's not just a sermon on the mount. You know, people say, well, that seems to contradict what Jesus said, and so I think I'll just stick with Jesus. Wait a second.

If you're going to stick with Jesus, you have to stick with what we've just read in Deuteronomy chapter 24 as well. Right? So think about that now. And I don't know the reason for that law.

All I can think of is God wants this man, the first husband, to really think about it before he divorces his wife because the law says you can't get her back again, at least once she's been remarried and divorced, or remarried and even widowed. You can't get her back again. Okay? Very interesting stuff.

We'll continue right here in our next segment. So we'll be right back. Stick with us.

And we'll see you in one minute after this short break. These very ancient stairs that I'm walking on right now actually predate Jesus, and there's no doubt that Jesus and his disciples would have walked up and down these stairs many times on their journeys into the Temple Mount. It led right up to the southern wall where the Haldegate entrance was into the Temple Mount proper, and the stairs are so designed that you take a small step and then you have to kind of regather yourself and take a larger step.

It's, I think, to remind the worshippers that they're entering into a holy place and that they should be thinking about what they're doing. It's not just a hurried, rushed thing. Jesus would have walked up these stairs many times as a child.

Every time he and Mary and Joseph came to celebrate the Passover, they would have walked up and down these stairs. So this is about as close as you can get to something that Jesus experienced when he was on the earth. Okay, welcome back.

Let's continue looking at the subject of divorce and remarriage as Jesus taught about it in the Sermon on the Mount, and this is not the only place he said something about it. Divorce was commonplace in Jesus' day. I mean, it was so commonplace because the Pharisees, for the most part, had made divorce such an easy thing.

You could divorce your wife for any cause at all. Remember, they came to Jesus one time and they asked him to test him, the Pharisees. Read about it in Matthew chapter 19.

They said, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all? Well, why are they asking that? Well, obviously, it's a hot issue in their day, and obviously, they're persuaded, the majority of them were, that it was lawful to divorce your wife for any cause at all. Of course, if it is, then the Pharisees and everyone who's following them are divorcing their wives for any cause at all, and what would be the main cause they'd divorce their wife? Because they found somebody better, somebody more attractive, somebody who they're lusting after, and so they divorce their wife, remarry, and they think, I'm guiltless. Jesus is raising the bar and saying, that is no different than adultery.

Now, we just covered Deuteronomy chapter 24. There's only three places in the Old Testament where Jesus Christ revealed something about forbidding remarriage. One was in Deuteronomy chapter 24.

Deuteronomy chapter 24. That's where this twice-divorced or once-divorced, once-widowed woman is not permitted to go back to her first husband, and that's the only case that Deuteronomy chapter 24 speaks about. It doesn't apply to anything else.

Now, two other prohibitions in the Old Covenant, according to the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave the law of the Old Covenant. One was, a high priest was not permitted to marry a divorced woman. Now, does that make it automatically wrong for everybody else? No, of course not.

Why would God say, the high priest is forbidden to marry a divorced woman if it was wrong for everyone to marry a divorced woman, or for a divorced woman to remarry? You see, you know, God would have just made it across-the-board rule, but he never said that anywhere in the Old Testament. But he does forbid the high priest. Now, he also forbids the high priest from marrying a widowed woman.

You see, the bar is very high for the high priest. Was it wrong, then, for everyone else to marry someone who was widowed? No! In fact, the Scripture flat-out says that it's lawful for a widowed woman to be remarried and for a man to marry a woman who's been widowed. So it was only a requirement for the high priest.

I'm just trying to show you that in context. Just because God says it's wrong for one person doesn't make it wrong for every person. The bar was very high for the high priest.

He represents Jesus Christ. And then there was only one other case where remarriage was prohibited, and that was in the case of the regular priest. Now, the regular priest could marry widowed women, but they were not allowed to marry divorced women.

Does that mean it's wrong for everybody else? No! If it was wrong for everybody else to marry a divorced woman, God would have just said that. He wouldn't have had to say it's wrong for the high priest and the priest to do that. He just would have said it's wrong for everyone to do that.

And so you see, under the Old Covenant, which Jesus Christ gave, the same person who spoke the words we're reading in Matthew chapter 5 right now, he said for, let's just say, 1,300 years from the giving of the law, and we can even go back further, all the way to the creation of Adam and Eve. Let's go back 3,000 years prior. All that Jesus said about that was remarriage is permissible for divorced women except if they've been twice divorced or once divorced, once widowed, they can't go back and remarry one person, their first husband, or divorced women cannot marry high priests or priests.

That's it. They're allowed to remarry anyone else. And so that would also make it lawful for men other than the high priest, priest in general, or the man whose wife he divorced and she'd been remarried and divorced or widowed, he could not take her back.

You see? That was it. So now Jesus comes along and it seems like so many of us have taken Jesus' words and ignored everything else that Jesus said prior to that about divorce and remarriage and, you know, is now completely laying down a brand new law that actually contradicts everything he said prior. I don't believe that because Christ said I did not come to abolish the law and the prophets.

No, he gave the law. He inspired the prophets. It was all his idea.

And so he's not contradicting himself now. He's not changing everything. So that's what I'm saying.

He's addressing a specific issue that existed in his day. We know it existed because we have an historical record. In the Bible itself, the Pharisees came to him and said, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all? And here's what Christ said.

Have you not read that from the beginning God created them male and female? And so when God joined together, let no man separate. That is, it was never God's intention for anyone to get a divorce. She said except for the cause of immorality or unchastity, there's no lawful reason for divorce.

Well, God's laws never stop people from breaking his law, have they? And God makes provision for the breakers of his law. He makes atonement. He offers forgiveness for those who repent and so forth.

And so divorce, although God never intended for anyone to get divorced, God was not surprised when people got divorced. And again, there was lawful reason for divorce, according to Jesus. Sexual immorality on the part of one spouse or the other, you could lawfully divorce your spouse for that.

And of course, remarriage was permitted. You're just a victim of your spouse's infidelity. Of course you're permitted to get remarried.

So I'm just trying to provoke our thinking. So Jesus is against divorce. Divorce, it always involves sin.

No one should ever get divorced. God's opposed to divorce. Malachi, God said to Malachi, God hates divorce.

But divorce happens. So what happens after divorce? Well, God in his mercy and grace allows remarriage. Now Jesus said, in what we just read in Matthew chapter 5, let me go back to it again, I say to you, everyone who divorces his wife except for the cause of unchastity makes her commit adultery.

Logically, think about that. How could a man who divorces his wife make her commit adultery if she never got remarried? There'd be no sense in which she could be considered an adulteress if she stayed single. So Jesus is assuming she's going to get remarried and he's saying, it's like you're making her commit adultery.

Now, is she at fault? Is she at sin? Is she to be blamed because her husband divorced her and she's a victim and now she gets remarried? Is she a sinner? No! Jesus is saying, you scribes and Pharisees, you think you're divorcing your wives and you're guiltless because you're not committing adultery as you jump into bed with your new wife whom you were lusting after before you divorced your first wife. And he's saying, you think you're guiltless. I'm telling you, you're committing adultery.

And not only that, but God's holding you accountable for a second act of adultery. It's as if you took your first wife and forced her into bed with another man. And so I'm getting you on two counts of adultery.

You think you're guiltless? You're more guilty than if you had actually committed adultery because you're creating a circumstance in which your wife has no, really basically no alternative but to remarry. So now she's having a sexual relationship legitimate in God's eyes with her second husband because she's a victim of your selfishness. But as far as your account, I'm holding you account as if you had forced your wife to commit adultery.

See? That's the only thing that makes logical sense. You know, if the man who divorces his wife forces her to commit adultery as Jesus said here, she has to get remarried and it wouldn't be fair of God to hold her accountable for adultery if she's nothing more than the victim of her former husband's selfishness. Okay? So again, what I'm trying to do here is interpret this in light of the whole Bible.

Divorce is always a sin. There's no doubt about that. But God is a God of mercy and grace and He allows remarriage in His mercy and grace.

And people try to make special rules that apply to Christians and non-Christians and always trying to figure out when you got divorced, were you a Christian or were you not a Christian? If you weren't a Christian when you got divorced then they'll say it's okay for you to get remarried. If you were a Christian when you got divorced now you've got to stay single for the rest of your life. Now God somehow has more mercy and grace on non-Christians than He does on His own children.

So many questions being raised by this. Now, in this broadcast, I don't have the time to go into the detail that's required to do a thorough job of this very important and controversial subject. But I've written a chapter of a book which we posted on our website www.shepherdserve.org You can see that on your screen.

And if you go there and just look for the article on divorce and remarriage and you'll see a very, very thorough job. Also, in that chapter that you can read on our website for free 1 Corinthians 6 where something is said by the Apostle Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit and he says, are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. He's writing to Christians.

He's saying, don't get a divorce. Are you released from a wife? He says, that is, are you divorced? Do not seek a wife. Now listen, verse 28 But if you should marry Who's he speaking to? The one who's released from a wife.

The divorced person. If you should marry, you have not sinned. And to make it so clear that he's speaking to a divorced person, he says And if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned.

So he covers both categories there. The one who's never been married and the one who's previously been married and he says in both cases, he recommends under the present circumstances don't get married or don't get remarried if you've been divorced. But, in either case, if the virgin marries, she has not sinned.

If you've been divorced and you get remarried you have not sinned. Because God is a God of grace. He gives a second chance.

And unfortunately, I'm afraid that Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount and in Matthew 19 have been taken from the context of the Bible and we've made divorce practically the unpardonable sin but oh my goodness, divorce and remarriage is the unpardonable sin. Well, Jesus said, if we take it verbatim for what he said, then anyone who has been divorced and is currently remarried, if we ignore all the rest of the Bible you have no chance of going to heaven. If that's how we should interpret this.

Because he said, you're committing adultery if you're remarried and all adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God, the scripture says. And so they're all going to hell. And so we have to tell them when we preach the gospel Jesus loves you, Jesus died for you.

Now those of you who have been divorced and remarried before you get saved you have to commit one more sin and you've got to divorce again. Wouldn't that sound foolish to say? And there's so many other questions that would be raised and are raised by many common interpretations of what Christ said here. I'm trying to provoke your thinking to give you an alternative that fits in with the rest of scripture and fits in actually with the gospel itself.

What's the gospel? The gospel is we sinned, God hates sin, Jesus died for our sins, God offers forgiveness for those who repent and he gives them a second chance. And divorce and remarriage is under that whole category. Again, check out our website and read that article on divorce and remarriage there and you can have all your questions answered that I have not answered in this broadcast thanks for joining me, until next time keep following Jesus with all your heart God bless you.

Hey there's a whole lot more happening to the ministry of Heaven's Family than just this teaching broadcast Heaven's Family consists of three divisions the first of which is Shepherd Serve and through the ministry of Shepherd Serve we are literally equipping thousands of hungry pastors around the world with vital biblical truth every single year we do that in two ways first of all by pastors conferences they're happening almost every single month somewhere in the world and secondly through the translation and publication and distribution of a 500 page equipping manual called the Disciple Making Minister pastors are just loving this book because it's full of information that helps equip them to be more fruitful for the Lord Jesus Christ that in a nutshell is the ministry of Shepherd Serve The second division of Heaven's Family is known as Orphan's Tier and through the ministry of Orphan's Tier we are meeting the very pressing needs of over a thousand Christian orphans in over six different developing nations through a sponsorship program that is absolutely wonderful for just \$20 a month you can provide food, clothing, shelter school fees and Christian nurture for a little follower price somewhere in the world hey why don't you check out orphanstier.org there's probably someone waiting there just for you the third and the final division of Heaven's Family is known as I Was Hungry obviously taken from the words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 25 where he warned about the future judgment of the sheep and of the goats through the ministry of I Was Hungry we are meeting the very pressing needs of Christ followers around this world in very poor nations we're helping widows, orphans, lepers refugees, victims of disasters you can read all of our current projects at IWasHungry.org you can make a real difference if you'd like to get involved in all three of the divisions of Heaven's Family you can invest in what is called the Heaven's Family Mutual Fund it's a great idea, you can read about it at all three of our websites thanks so much God bless you

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